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FROM: Mayor Frank V. Hibbard_____

DATE: July 8, 2010_____

**MESSAGE: Frank V. Hibbard
Mayor, City of Clearwater, Florida
Testimony for Monday, July 12, 2010**

“The Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Chain of Command: An Examination of Information Sharing Practices During a Spill of National Significance”

Number of Pages (Including Cover): ____4____

TESTIMONY TO COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Mayor Frank V. Hibbard, Mayor City of Clearwater, Florida

July 12, 2010

New Orleans, Louisiana

“The Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Chain of Command: An Examination of Information Sharing Practices During a Spill of National Significance”

I would like to thank the committee on Homeland Security for the opportunity to address the tragic events in the Gulf that we have been dealing with since April. I will be focusing my comments on communication between different levels of government, BP and the public. I would also like to provide anecdotal examples of how this catastrophe is affecting our local and state economy.

I did have the opportunity to travel to New Orleans in June with the US Conference of Mayors and tour some of the Louisiana coast line. I have seen the resources being utilized and the devastation to the environment and economy. I am sensitive to efficient use of resources and making sure that resources are available to those most in need. I do know that the issues in Louisiana are different from those in Florida and believe the Federal Government has a responsibility along with BP in recognizing this as a factor in allocation of resources.

It is understood that we are functioning under unified command throughout this event but at times it is unclear whether BP or the Coast Guard has ultimate authority. The difficulty for local government is that we are in daily contact with our citizens and businesses and they look to us to be a filter and advocate for them. Currently the Coast Guard and White House have daily conference calls, originally local governments were not privy to these calls, that has since changed.

We look to our County emergency managers on a local basis for mitigation strategies and to determine whether we have all the resources to combat oil should it arrive on our beaches and estuaries, and the different forms it may manifest itself. We are concerned about usurping the resources that are currently needed elsewhere but also want to insure that we are prepared and will have access to the resources should they become necessary. The time frames in which we would be notified by Coast Guard have been a moving target between 4 and 6 days. As a Mayor I have to be able to assure our coastal residents and businesses that we will be prepared to minimize damage and coordinate a rapid clean-up!

I have personally listened to several of the conference calls and they are helpful in staying abreast of recent developments especially on a technical side. I would hope that an additional format can be developed that is more appropriate for a layman. We need information that is technically accurate but can be used to educate the media, citizens, and the tourist industry. Our greatest challenge in Clearwater and along the entire Florida coast is getting accurate information about where oil is and areas that most probably will not be directly affected.

While there has been a shift of economic activity in Louisiana from fishing to oil clean-up, Florida is not reaping an offset of activity we are simply seeing a decline in tourism activity. While those in Louisiana fight a legitimate physical battle with oil we are in a fight with

perception and the stigma of potential oil. We do not have a flood of workers staying in our hotels on the contrary we are losing reservations on a daily basis.

Currently we are in our high season for tourists from Great Britain and Germany this is very challenging because these countries require tour operators to guarantee the quality of their customer's experience. This guarantee has resulted in many tour operators taking Florida off their menu of destinations. They have done this because even with the knowledge that oil is not on Clearwater's beach today there is no assurance that in a month when their client arrives that we will still be unaffected. Many of our larger hotels have introduced programs that offer a money back guarantee should oil be on our beaches, this is beneficial but does not eliminate the second issue which is airlines. The second roadblock is that airlines are not allowing people to get out of their reservations and so they are choosing other destinations.

What has all this done to our economy? It has hampered what was starting to be a slow recovery from the recession and a very cold spring. The multiplier effect of this is tremendous impacting; restaurants, fishing charters, logistical companies, retail, marketing firms, advertising, real estate, sales tax, car rentals, etc. We recently had a group meeting from the Labor Department that canceled because of the threat of oil and is now going to Boulder.

A few examples of the multiplier effect; we recently had a convention coming that had contracted with a limousine and bus company for all transportation it was a contract worth \$35,000 and with the conference moving to outside Florida that operator has lost that revenue which creates jobs for drivers and a means to cash flow vehicles. A prominent realtor I spoke with recently lost two beach front condo closings due to the threat of oil on our sugar white sand beaches. This resulted in a loss of commission that the realtor will not be spending locally. The State has lost documentary stamp revenue. There is no need for movers or the buying of appliances or any of the other activities associated with a real estate transaction. Eventually those units will sell but possibly at a lower price which then diminishes property tax revenues that leads to fewer dollars for Police, Fire and Libraries. These are claims that are virtually impossible to quantify and will most likely never find their way to BP.

We in Florida also face the challenge of geography, Clearwater is over eight hours from Pensacola but the media reports that oil is on Florida's beaches without distinguishing that the majority of the State is completely unaffected. I am not hopeful at getting our nation to become better at geography nor those from other countries, that is why the quality of the information and the format in which it is presented is so crucial. This falls to BP and the Coast Guard as the originator of data. I would appreciate BP spending more money on public relations for the areas that have been affected tangibly and simply through perception.

I hope that this synopsis is helpful and I look forward to answering questions not addressed as we work together to repair this devastating tragedy.



CITY OF CLEARWATER

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CITY COUNCIL

Supplemental Sheet
Testimony to Committee on Homeland Security
July 12, 2010, New Orleans, Louisiana

"The Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Chain of Command: An Examination of Information Sharing Practices During a Spill of National Significance"

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- I. Focus on communications between different levels of government, BP and the public
- II. Concerned about usurping resources that are currently needed elsewhere but must be able to assure coastal residents and businesses that we will be prepared to minimize damage and coordinate rapid clean-up.
- III. Information technically accurate geared to the layman is needed to educate media, citizens and the tourist industry.
- IV. Florida seeing a decline in tourism
- V. European visitors often rely on tour operators who cannot guarantee the quality of the customer's experience. They are taking Florida off their menu of destinations. Airlines do not offer cancellation options.
- VI. Disaster seriously hampering economic recovery impacting many businesses
 - a. Examples of the businesses being impacted
- VII. Hope BP will be spending more money on public relations

FRANK V. HIBBARD, MAYOR

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